

12. Fe. m.
1.
The Sabbath 12. February, 1757.

SERMON

Preached before the Right Honourable

HOUSE OF LORDS,

IN THE

Abby-Church, Westminster,

UPON

Friday the 11th Day of February, 1757.

Printed by J. Knapton, at the Sign of the Sun in Pall-mall.

Die Sabbati 12^{mo}. Februarii, 1757.

Ordered,

BY the Lords Spiritual and Temporal
in Parliament assembled, That the
Thanks of this House be, and are hereby
given to the Lord Bishop of BANGOR, for
the Sermon by him preached before this
House, Yesterday, in the Abby Church,
Westminster; and he is hereby desired to
cause the same to be forthwith printed and
published.

ASHLEY COWPER,

Cler. Parliamentor.



12 Feb 1
A
S E R M O N

Preached before the Right Honourable the
Lords SPIRITUAL and TEMPORAL
in Parliament assembled,

IN THE
Abby-Church, Westminster,

UPON

Friday the 11th Day of February, 1757.

BEING

The Day appointed by Proclamation for a GENERAL
FAST and Humiliation before Almighty God; to be
observed in a most devout and solemn Manner, by
sending up Our Prayers and Supplications to the Divine
Majesty:

For obtaining Pardon of Our Sins, and for averting those
heavy Judgments which Our manifold Provocations
have most justly deserved; and imploring his Blessing
and Assistance on the Arms of His Majesty by Sea and
Land, and for restoring and perpetuating Peace, Safety,
and Prosperity to Himself and to His Kingdoms.

K. Egerton

By J O H N, Lord Bishop of B A N G O R.

L O N D O N:

Printed for J. WHISTON and B. WHITE, at Mr.
Boyle's-Head in Fleet-Street. M. DCC. LVII.

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A
S E R M O N

Preached before the Right Honourable the

Lords SPIRITUAL and TEMPORAL
in Parliament assembled

IN THE

Abbey-Church, Westminster

UPON

Monday the 11th Day of November 1733

BEING

The Day appointed by Proclamation for a General
Fast and Humiliation before Almighty God to be
observed at a most devout and religious
Assembly of our People and Ministers in the
City of London

For observing the Word of God, and for turning
heavy Judgments which our manifold Iniquities
have justly deserved; and for seeking His Blessing
and Assistance on the Arms of His Majesty King
George II. in the present War, and for obtaining
His Majesty's Blessing and Assistance in the
same

By JOHN N. Lord Bishop of Bath and Wells

L O N D O N

Printed for J. W. Norton and R. W. Norton
in Pall-mall, near the Theatre, M.DCCCLXXXIII

(2)

2 CHRON. xxxii. 7th, and Part of the 8th Verse.

*Be strong and couragious, be not afraid nor dismayed
for the King of Assyria, nor for all the Multitude
that is with him, for there are more with us than
with him; with him is an Arm of Flesh, but
with us is the Lord our God to help us.*

THE part of the sacred history, from which these words are taken, informs us, that as soon as the pious *Hezekiah* perceived it to be the fixed intention of *Sennacherib* the *Assyrian* to fight against *Jerusalem*, he took counsel with his *Princes and mighty Men*, that he might pursue the most salutary measures, and be prepared to make a vigorous defence against so powerful an enemy.

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He stopped the waters of the fountains which were without the City ;---he provided great stores for the defence of his people;---called together his armed men;---rebuilt the walls, which had been broken down; and, in fine, omitted nothing that might enable him to repel the danger with which Jerusalem was then threatened.

Thus far he acted as a wise and cautious governor; but this was not the whole of *Hezekiah's* conduct, for whilst he exercised every human precaution, and collected all his earthly strength, he yet placed no presumptuous dependence on the sufficiency of their force; he forgot not his duty to God the King of Kings, but religiously trusted the event to divine providence, and encouraged his subjects, by exhorting them *to be courageous, and not to be dismayed for the King of Assyria, or for the multitude with him; for with us (said that pious Prince) there are more than with him.*

Thereby intimating, that great and formidable as the *Assyrian* army appeared in their eyes, yet the *Jewish* forces were still superior; superior even in number, because *the Lord of hosts was their*

their helper, to whom a thousand thousand minister, and before whom ten thousand times ten thousand stand continually†; and certainly therefore superior in power too, since the dependance of *Assyria* was an arm of flesh only, whilst *Judah's* trust was in *the Lord, the God of all flesh*, whom the prophet *Jeremiah* solemnly introduces asking this question; *Is there any thing too hard for me?* ‡

History in general affords us a great variety of lively and animating exhortations delivered by Kings and Generals at the head of their armies, but none of them are so expressive, none so truly encouraging as this before us, by which we are authoritatively instructed, that we ought chiefly to rely upon the protection of Almighty God: And our own most gracious Sovereign, convinced of this great truth, that we cannot derive a reasonable expectation of success from any other source, has ordered all his people too to be gathered together in the most solemn manner; not to assure us indeed, that God will certainly fight our battles, but that we may qualify ourselves by Fasting and Humiliation, by Prayer and Repentance, for that Mercy, which on other terms is not reasonably to be expected.

† Daniel vii. 10.

‡ Jer. xxxii. 27.

In order to evince this doctrine, and, as far as I am able, to promote the end, for which the present most solemn meeting is intended, it shall be my endeavour to shew,

That, as God is the supreme Governour of the universe, the truest support of courage must be a well-grounded confidence in the divine assistance;

And, that this well-grounded confidence, this reasonable hope, can be obtained only by the truly religious.

There are some so indolent, so timorous, or so careless and inactive, even in the most essential affairs of life, that they seem to think that Providence should do every thing for their support, and behave themselves to all appearance, as if they were perverse enough to understand that wise precept of *taking no thought for the morrow* *, in its strict and literal sense; whereas it tends only to forbid an immoderate solicitude and anxiety for the success of our worldly affairs; but by no means discountenances a prudent and honest industry.

* Matthew vi. 34.

Others,

Others, again, place so total a reliance on their own powers only, that they appear to exclude a Providence from having any Superintendence over mankind; and seem to think, that there is no supreme ruler over all, or none at least who condescends to direct the events of things, which to them appear inconsiderable and unworthy of the divine interposition. And, when they observe, what frequently happens, that events do not in any way answer the probabilities of second causes, *that the race is not always to the swift, nor the battle to the strong**, they admit into their scheme of philosophy the impious though fashionable doctrines of Nature, Chance, and Fate; whereas the true, namely, the christian philosophy informs us, that God ever presides over the work of his own hands; that the words, Nature, Chance, and Fate, are (as they use them) but empty sounds, and void of import; or, if they can be said to have any meaning, are expressive only of ignorance and impiety; and that what is foolishly attributed to these vanities, ought solely to be ascribed to the direction of that all-wise Providence, without whom, as the Evangelist expresses it, *not a sparrow falleth to the ground*†.

Thus

† Eccl. ix. 11.

* Matt. x. 29.

Thus it cannot be doubted that the Deity, who is *good* as well as *great*, will not think it unbecoming his divine Majesty to inspect the minutest actions of every individual of the human race, --- and much less can it be made a question, but that the same supreme Being, who condescends to influence our conduct as individuals, should vouchsafe to superintend the great events of the world, the fate of a city, or of a whole people.

And that it hath pleased God so to do, at sundry times and in various manners, must appear to every serious confuter even of prophane history, which, though it treats only of nations covered with superstition, and abominable in their worship, proclaims nevertheless the interposition, the Power, and the Justice of the Almighty; and, above all, the admirable Wisdom by which the Universe is governed.

It must indeed be confessed, that the divine Majesty is no where so fully displayed as in the history of the *Jews*; for there God is seated visibly upon his throne between the Cherubims, all Nature attending to execute his commands;-- there we hear him awfully proclaiming his own
sacred

sacred laws, and delivering his infallible oracles;—and there too we behold him, upon every occasion, wonderfully interposing in the affairs of his elect people, with immediate rewards and immediate punishments,—thereby affording us such cogent proof of the exertion of an extraordinary Providence, that we cannot but confess, with the Psalmist, that * *Judah was his sanctuary, and Israel his dominion.*

But tho' † *God was known in Jary, and his name was great in Israel*, yet was he not forgetful of other nations, over whom he always retained, and exercised his supreme power. To suppose the contrary, would be to doubt both of the Justice and the Omnipotence of the Deity; it would be to make him the master of one family, of one people only; whereas the Lord is God, not of the *Jews* singly, but of the *Gentiles* also,—not of one nation, *but of the universe.*

And such he undoubtedly was, even whilst the *Jews* were chosen to be his peculiar people; who therefore can presume, that he is not so at this Time, when all distinction is at an end? Is God then the God of the *Jews* and of the *Gentiles*, and not also of

* Psalm cxiv. 2.

† Ibid. lxxvi. 1.

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the Christians? Most assuredly he is the God of the Christians also; * *He is the Saviour of all men, but of those especially who believe in his word.*

Let us advert then to the great sources of that confidence, by which men are led so far to forget themselves as to rely upon their own powers. And these will be found principally to arise from a conceit of their wisdom, an opinion of their strength, and a false dependance upon that protection, which their worldly possessions can afford them.

And it must be granted, that, as a Nation, we enjoy these blessings in a peculiar manner, and in their fullest extent. We abound with men able to assist us in our councils, and to instruct us in wisdom;—the valour of our troops stands confessed, even by our enemies;—and wealth is brought home to us, from the most distant corners of the earth.

But, to use these properly, is our great concern; they are the goods of this world, and the instruments of happiness in it; yet it must be remembered, that they are but instruments and secondary

* 1 Tim. iv. 10.

causes. Let us not then forget the giver, and rely upon the gift; bearing it for ever in our minds, that he, who can bestow, hath power also to deprive; that our ingratitude may justly move him to the exertion of that power; and that the surest way to secure the continuance of blessings, is not presumptuously to depend upon them, as things certain and permanent, but to deserve the increase of those, we already have, by a frequent and sincere acknowledgment. For tho' it hath not pleased the supreme Being in these later ages (necessity not requiring it) to give such manifest proofs of the divine interposition, as he hath heretofore done, in behalf of his chosen people, and in the earlier times, yet we are not left without convincing testimony, both from various general passages in the scriptures, and also from our own discernment, that there is an hand unseen, a secret providence, which in all occurrences, private or public, "presents us with unexpected opportunities, and interposes accidents, which no human wisdom can foresee or prevent."

May we then reflect on our conduct as a people, and enter into an impartial consideration, whether we have not in general laid too great a stress upon the efficacy of our own powers, with-

out having had a due recourse by prayer and good works to Him, from whom we have received whatever we possess, and thro' whom alone that possession is continued to us ; and, when this question is determined in the affirmative, as certainly it must, can we fail of being convinced, that in order to secure a prospect of future success, something more will be wanting, some surer dependance, than such, as can be placed in the strength of our armaments, or in the wisdom of man. For thus saith the Lord by the prophet *Jeremiah*, *Let not the wise man glory in his wisdom, neither let the mighty man glory in his might, let not the rich man glory in his riches ; but let him that glorieth, glory in this, that he understandeth and knoweth me, that I am the Lord**.

But, as courage is but fool-hardiness, and our strength as men, but weak and insufficient, if not joined with a lively confidence in the divine assistance ; so, that confidence will but little profit us, unless it is built upon a sure and solid foundation ; such, as may enable us to frame a reasonable hope of averting the wrath of God, and obtaining that help, and those blessings, which we now sue for with fasting and humiliation.

* Jer. ix. 23, 24.

From whence then can we derive this reasonable hope, this well-grounded confidence, but from true religion? the sum and substance of which is, the love of God, and the love of our neighbour: not an empty profession of love to God, but such a love, as will manifest itself by faith, obedience, and adoration.---And such a love of our neighbour, as must prove itself to be undissembled, disinterested, and productive of all those social virtues, so particularly enumerated, and so powerfully recommended by the great apostle.

Among these the principal place is given to charity; and surely no duty required of us demands more to be put in practice, and that too in its fullest extent. But one branch of it in particular calls at this time for a most earnest recommendation, namely, that of giving alms and relief to the necessitous; for, amidst the present scarcity of the fruits of the earth, it behoves those, who seem as yet to be placed above the reach of the calamity, to feel for others as they would for themselves; that (as the angel told Cornelius) our *prayers and our alms may come up for a memorial before God**, and plead in our behalf. For we may be assured, that nothing less, than a most sincere endeavour to perform all christian duties, can

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recommend

* Acts x. 4.

recommend us to the favour, and give us a well-grounded trust in the mercies of the Almighty. We are sensible that, even in our temporal affairs, we cannot otherwise be entitled to the protection of an earthly prince, than by a faithful allegiance joined with a just and equitable behaviour towards our brethren,---all acts of treason are death to ourselves, with the loss of honour and estate to our families;--all injuries done to our neighbour are attended with punishments, which the law of every country makes suitable to the offence.

Since then the favour or protection of no human government can be expected but upon the terms of true allegiance and a due observation of the law; which are surely no unreasonable conditions; how can we presume upon the favour of Heaven, unless we endeavour to offer up to the Almighty Governor of the Universe the reasonable sacrifice of an holy life! But this truth stands confirmed to us in the words of God himself by the prophet *Malachi*, addressed to all those, who offer an insincere or imperfect service; and yet have the audaciousness to expect the acceptance of it. *A Son honoureth his Father, and a Servant his Master; if then I am a Father, where is mine Honour? And if I am a Master, where is my Fear?*

If ye offer the blind for sacrifice, is it not evil? And, if ye offer the lame and sick, is it not evil? Offer it now unto thy governour, will he be pleased with thee or accept thy person? saith the Lord of Hosts. The conclusion from this is evident, such offerings will be rejected with indignation, and they who dared to offer them will bear the punishment of their iniquity†.*

We know then our duty, but how have we performed it? Are we informed from within, have we the testimony of our consciences, that we have already prepared for ourselves an acceptable sacrifice, and such, in which the heart may find a well-grounded confidence? we have no such information, no such testimony.

For, if this confidence is to be founded only in the practice of true religion, if true religion consists in the love of God and of our neighbour, if the love of God is to be expressed by faith, obedience, and adoration, and that of our neighbour by every act of kindness and beneficence to all mankind, it is too evident, that we are in general deficient in some of these essential duties, that the best can have no ground to hope for protection without the

* Mal. i. 6, 8.

† Ezekiel xiv. 10.

the highest presumption, and that therefore we must all become humble suitors for the divine mercy.

Nothing is more plainly delivered to us in holy writ, than that, *without faith, it is impossible to please God* †; and could any doctrine of the sacred writings stand in need of confirmation, how powerfully will this truth at all times be corroborated by considering, that nothing is more certain than that the strongest human reason is but narrow in its comprehension, falls far short of being perfect, and has bounds affixed to it, which are not to be surpassed.

There are certain truths, which, as St. Paul informs the *Corinthians*, are *the deep things of God* *, and these can never be represented to us by our quickest senses, or made plain by our utmost penetration, for they are too large to *enter into the heart of man* †; but these things *bath God revealed unto us by his holy Spirit* §, *who at sundry times and in divers manners spake in time past unto the fathers* || *by the mouth of his holy prophets, which have been since the world began* ¶; and *bath in these last days spoken unto us by his Son; that, which at first began to be spoken by the Lord, being confirmed unto us by them* that

† Heb. xi. 6. * 1 Cor. ii. 10. † ver. 9. § ver. 11.
|| Heb. i. 1. ¶ Luke i. 70.

that heard him; God also bearing them witness, both with signs and wonders, and with divers miracles, and gifts of the Holy Ghost, according to his own will †.

Now, inasmuch as all these instructions and revelations of the Prophets, of the Son of God himself, of the Evangelists, and the Apostles, are collectively contained in that sacred volume, which we emphatically call the Scripture, how thankful ought we to be to the God of all mercies, who hath been graciously pleased to bestow on the world this inestimable treasure, and more particularly to grant to *us*, of this happy nation, the privilege of a free access to it.

By what lively and natural expressions, both of body and mind, did the man, who was lame from his mother's womb, make manifest his joy and gratitude for his miraculous cure. St. Peter pronounced only these plain but powerful words, — *In the name of Jesus of Nazareth, rise up and walk. Then he took him by the right hand, and lift him up, and immediately his feet and ankle-bones received strength. And he, leaping up, stood, and walked, and entered into the temple leaping, and*

† Heb. ii. 3, 4.

walking,

walking, and praising God * — If then this poor man was so rejoiced and full of gratitude, at receiving the use of his limbs, how should our hearts overflow with love and holy joy, when we hear from the mouth of our Saviour these blessed tidings, *that not only the blind receive their sight, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear; but also that the dead are raised, and the poor have the gospel preached to them* †.

Is it not then astonishing, that the hardest heart should not be totally overcome by such exceeding goodness? and is it not still more inconceivable, that any should be offended at so unmerited a mercy? And yet such was the foreknowledge of our Saviour *Jesus Christ*, such his penetration into the heart of man, that he pronounces a blessing on all those, *who shall not be offended in him* ‡; thereby plainly intimating, that such wretches might and would arise; and how is it to be wished that the present age afforded no such examples! — but the contrary is too evident; nor is the number small among us of those, who instead of receiving the Word of God with thankfulness and submission, have presumed both in private and publick, in their conversations and in their writings, to pronounce the

* Acts iii. 6, 7, 8. † Matt. xi. 5. ‡ Ibid. xi. 6.
revelation

revelation of it to be at least unnecessary, if not inexpedient, and altogether impossible: if ever then these men have read the Scripture, their design must have been to cavil, and not to be instructed: but are they in reality so wise, as not to want an instructor? are they so perfectly, so intimately acquainted with the almost infinite relations of things, as to be fully qualified for laying down certain principles of belief, and a rule of life sufficient for themselves and others?

The contrary has hitherto been apparent in respect to those, whose conduct as moral agents has been known to us, and whose writings have been thought worthy of examination; so that, while such persons have been exerting their utmost efforts to spread the infection, the inconclusiveness of their reasoning, the depravity of their morals, and the deformity of their doctrines, have stood forth only as signals to all thinking men, to secure them from shipwreck, and confirm their minds in the pursuit of that true course, which is so plainly marked out to us by the precepts of Christianity, the purity of whose doctrines is confessed even by its enemies.

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Is it not then inexcusable to call upon the name of *Christ*, and not to depart from iniquity? — to profess to have faith, and yet not to manifest it by good works?

But (to use the words of an inspired writer). *Have we given all diligence to add to our faith, virtue; and to virtue, knowledge; to knowledge, temperance; and to temperance, patience; and to patience, godliness; and to godliness, brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness, charity *.* Or, have we not rather been scandalously remarkable for the opposite vices? instead of seeking the fruits of the spirit, we have gone on securely to pursue the works of darkness, never seriously asking ourselves this solemn question, *Will not God visit for these things? and shall not be avenged of such a nation as this †?* But the time past of our lives may suffice us to have wrought the will of the Gentiles ‖. — It would now therefore become us, especially on this solemn day, instantly to begin the great and necessary work of repentance, by a strict examination and confession of our manifold offences; by a stedfast purpose to lead a new life; and by humble supplications to the Almighty God, to strengthen and enable us, thro' grace, to put our holy resolutions

* 2 Pet. i. 5, 6, 7. † Jer. v. 9. ‖ 1 Pet. iv 3.

into practice, and to persevere in well-doing;— for tho' fasting and humiliation are laudable acts, acceptable to God, and highly conducive to the great end proposed by them, inasmuch as they put the mind in a proper temper to reflect with contrition upon our past behaviour, and to offer up the sincerest vows of amendment to the throne of mercy; yet as the single acts of an hour only, or a day appointed, they can never be considered, without an insult to the divine justice, as affording a propitiation for sins already committed, and at the same time a qualification for future benefits.

But God hath himself vouchsafed to explain the nature of a true fast to us in the following brief, but most expressive terms. "*Is it such a Fast, that I have chosen? a day for a man to afflict his soul? Is it to bow down his head as a bull-rush; and to spread sackcloth and ashes under him? Is it not to loose the bands of wickedness, to undo the heavy burdens, and to let the oppressed go free? Is it not to deal thy bread to the hungry, and that thou bring the poor that are cast out to thy house? when thou seest the naked that thou cover him, and that thou hide not thyself from thine own flesh*?*"

* Isai. lviii. 5, 6, 7.

Let not then our repentance be "*as the morning cloud, or as the early dew which passeth away* †," but let its influence over our conduct be as lasting as our lives! and, when we consider ourselves as a people, let us remember, that harmony and unanimity are as acceptable to God, as they are serviceable to our country; and may we thus be induced to banish all party-divisions, and join our hearts and our hands in the common defence, laying aside every odious title of distinction, and desiring only to be known, by the name of *Britons* and *Protestants*. By such an unanimity we shall shew the truest love for our country; and by that love to our country we shall give a most sincere testimony of our love to our neighbour.

But let us never be unmindful, that the first and great duty is the love of God, or piety, for it is this, which must give life and spirit to the performance of every other duty.—In fine, it is this, which exalts our morality into christianity; and it is christianity alone, which can entitle us to a lasting happiness.

In all our Ways then let us acknowledge the supreme Being, and consider him as the inspector

† Hof. xiii. 3.

and

(or)
and judge of every action of our lives. Let us be virtuous, uniformly and sincerely virtuous, and that not merely out of regard to the beauty and excellence of virtue, but in obedience to the commands of God, whose will is the strictest tie, and the strongest obligation, which can possibly be laid upon us.

By so doing, and not otherwise, we may obtain a true courage, and a well-grounded confidence; having reason to hope that God will not forsake us in the day of distress, but *will be jealous for his land, and pity his people* *.

* Joel, ii. 18.

E R R A T A.

Page 13. line 10. instead of *peformed*, read *performed*.
— 18. line 16. instead of *shall not be*, read, *shall not He be avenged*.

T H E E N D.

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Job. ii. 10.

THE END.